

The ground water to surface water migration component evaluates three threats: drinking water, human food chain, and environmental. The component is scored only if: (1) A portion of the surface water is within one mile of any source at the site that could release to ground water; (2) there is no discontinuity in the uppermost aquifer between the source and the portion of the surface water within one mile of the source; and (3) the bottom of the surface water is at or below the top of the aquifer. The target distance limit for the component is determined the same way as for the overland flow/flood component. For each threat, likelihood of release is based on either observed release or potential to release. An observed release is established if, and only if, there is an observed release to the uppermost aquifer, while potential to release is based on ground water potential to release factors, except that only the uppermost aquifer is considered. (See § 4.2.2.1.2.)

The hazardous waste quantity factor is scored in the same way it is scored for the overland flow/flood migration component, except that only sources that could release to ground water are considered (see § 4.2.2.2.2). Toxicity, ground water mobility, and surface water persistence are considered in selecting the substance potentially posing the greatest hazard in drinking water (see § 4.2.2.2.1). By considering ground water mobility, the final rule reflects the fraction of a hazardous substance expected to be released from the sources and to migrate through ground water to the surface water body. For human food chain and environmental threats, bioaccumulation (or ecosystem bioaccumulation) potential is also considered in selecting the substance potentially posing the greatest hazard (see § 4.2.3.2.1).

The targets factors in this component are evaluated in the same way as targets factors in the overland flow/flood migration component, except that a dilution-weight adjustment is combined with the surface water dilution weights for populations potentially exposed to contamination. The dilution-weight adjustment was added because the HRS assumes that hazardous substances migrate via ground water in all directions from a site. Under this assumption, except in those instances where the surface water body completely surrounds the site, only a portion of the hazardous substances can be assumed to reach the surface water through the ground water. The dilution-weight adjustment accounts for the portion of the hazardous substances

assumed to be available to migrate to surface water through ground water. The probable point of entry is defined as the shortest straight-line distance, within the aquifer boundaries, from the sources at the site to the surface water body. Therefore, the actual targets considered may differ somewhat from targets evaluated in the overland flow/flood migration component because the two probable points of entry may differ. This approach might allow evaluation of intakes, fisheries, and sensitive environments that may be exposed to contamination from a site but are upstream from the point of overland flow entry.

N. Soil Exposure Pathway

The onsite exposure pathway, which was added to the HRS in the proposed rule, has been renamed the soil exposure pathway in the final rule. The pathway was primarily designed to assess the potential threats posed by direct exposure to wastes and contaminated surficial materials at a site. It evaluated two threats—the resident population and the nearby population. In the proposed rule, the resident population threat included three types of targets: high risk population on a property with observed contamination, all other residents and people attending school or day care on a property with observed contamination, and terrestrial sensitive environments in which there is observed contamination. The nearby population was based on people who live or attend school within a one-mile travel distance and who did not meet the criteria for resident population. Figure 8 summarizes the proposed and final rules.

A number of commenters supported the inclusion of the pathway, but raised issues related to its evaluation. For example, commenters objected to evaluating the waste characteristics factor category solely on toxicity. Three commenters objected to limiting the high risk population to children under seven. Other commenters stated that collecting data on the high risk population would be difficult. A number of commenters questioned how the onsite area and area of contamination would be defined and how accessibility of the site was evaluated.

In response to these comments and to the field test results, EPA has made a number of changes to the soil exposure pathway. The name of the pathway has been changed to be more consistent with terminology used in the Superfund human health evaluation process.

As suggested by commenters, the final rule limits the area within which human targets are evaluated for the resident

population threat to locations within property boundaries and within a distance limit of 200 feet from an area of observed contamination. The 200-foot limit accounts for those situations where the property boundary is very large, and exposure to contaminated surficial materials is unlikely or infrequent because of the distance of residences, schools, or work places from an area of observed contamination on the same property.

To make the pathway consistent with the other pathways and in response to comments, the final rule includes hazardous waste quantity in the waste characteristics factor category and multiplies it by the factor value for toxicity. New factors, resident individual and nearby individual, have been added to make the pathway consistent with the other pathways, all of which assign values for the maximally exposed individual (e.g., nearest individual or intake). Population is evaluated using two levels of actual contamination based on health-based benchmarks. Separate consideration of the high risk population (children under seven) has been eliminated because the field test indicated that this factor could greatly add to the time and expense of scoring a site yet resulted in little discrimination among sites. This change also makes the soil exposure pathway more consistent with the other pathways.

In the nearby population threat, the hazardous waste quantity factor in the likelihood of exposure factor category has been renamed "area of contamination" to reflect both the intent of the factor and how it is evaluated. The accessibility/frequency of use factor has been revised and renamed the "attractiveness/accessibility" factor. The revised factor emphasizes recreational uses of areas of observed contamination because they are most likely to result in exposures to contaminated surficial materials. In addition, the weighting of the nearby population relative to the resident population has been reduced to better reflect the relative levels of exposure for those threats.

A number of commenters questioned whether workers should be counted when evaluating target populations in the soil exposure pathway. One commenter suggested that soil exposure scoring should "not include activities at facilities that presently are regulated under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)." Other commenters, however, stated that workers should be counted in the target population. One commenter argued that

not counting a facility's work force is inconsistent with other population counting techniques. Another commenter said that workers should be included in the resident population because the proposed method of calculating soil exposure pathway scores can result in inappropriately low scores when onsite workers are exposed to wastes or contaminated soil.

In response to these comments, the Agency investigated statutory, regulatory, and policy conditions that

might restrict the inclusion of workers in the target population for the soil exposure pathway. This analysis found no broad statutory or regulatory authority for excluding workers covered by OSHA regulations from consideration as targets in the HRS. Although the definition of a release under CERCLA section 101(22) excludes "any release which results in exposure to persons solely within a workplace * * *" it only does so for purposes of claims by workers who are already

covered by State worker compensation laws. The legislative history of section 101(22) specifically anticipated that authority under CERCLA might, in appropriate cases, be used to respond to releases within a workplace. Thus, the Agency concludes that there are no broad statutory or regulatory restrictions against consideration of activities at OSHA-regulated facilities.

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Figure 8

Soil Exposure Pathway

PROPOSED HRS

Resident Population Threat

Likelihood of Exposure	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Observed Contamination		Toxicity		High Risk Population Total Resident Population Terrestrial Sensitive Environments

+

Nearby Population Threat

Likelihood of Exposure	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Waste Quantity Accessibility/Frequency of Use		Toxicity		Population Within 1 Mile

FINAL HRS

Resident Population Threat

Likelihood of Exposure	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Observed Contamination		Toxicity Hazardous Waste Quantity		Resident Individual Resident Population Workers Resources Terrestrial Sensitive Environments

+

Nearby Population Threat

Likelihood of Exposure	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Attractiveness/Accessibility Area of Contamination		Toxicity Hazardous Waste Quantity		Population Within 1 Mile Nearby Individual

The soil exposure pathway is designed to account for exposures and health risks resulting from ingestion of contaminated surficial materials. Because ingestion exposures are comparable for some types of workers and residents, the Agency has decided to include workers in the resident population threat. However, substantial variability in the kinds of workers and work activities at sites (e.g., indoor and outdoor) leads to considerable variability in exposure potential. The Agency believes that determining specific categories or types of workers is beyond the scope of HRS data collection. Thus, workers are assigned target points on a prorated basis: 5 points are assigned for sites with up to 100 workers; 10 points for sites with 101 to 1,000 workers, and 15 points for greater than 1,000 workers. Prorating workers will reduce the data collection effort. Evaluation of workers is not affected by health-based benchmarks. (See § 5.1.3.3.) Nearby workers are not counted in the nearby population because the Agency considers it unlikely that workers from nearby workplaces would regularly visit contaminated areas outside the property boundary of their workplace during the workday, and because there is no way to estimate accurately the number of workers who might.

O. Air Migration Pathway

The proposed rule made several significant changes to the air migration pathway in the original HRS. In response to the SARA mandate to consider potential as well as actual releases to air, the proposed rule included an evaluation of the potential to release. The proposed rule also added a mobility factor to the waste characteristics factor category and an MEI factor to the targets category. Finally, the proposed rule added explicit distance weighting factors for evaluating all factors in the targets category. Figure 9 shows the proposed air migration pathway and the final rule pathway.

The public provided numerous comments on these changes and raised new issues as well. The most significant new issue concerned the structural inconsistency in the treatment of gases and particulates in the proposed air migration pathway. For example, commenters observed that in the potential to release evaluation, it was possible to assign a high containment value to a source with good gas containment and poor particulate containment while assigning high source type and mobility values based on the presence of gaseous hazardous substances. This combination would yield an inappropriately high potential

to release value. This concern was also noted in discussions with field test personnel.

The Agency agrees with these commenters and investigated methods to better reflect the differences between gases and particulates. As a result of these analyses, EPA has made several changes to the final rule in both the likelihood of release and waste characteristics factor categories.

In the likelihood of release factor category, the final rule evaluates source potential to release separately for gases and particulates. Only those sources containing gaseous hazardous substances are evaluated for gas potential to release, and only those sources containing hazardous substances that can be released as particulates are evaluated for particulate potential to release. This change in potential to release structure necessitated other changes in the scoring of potential to release including development of separate gas and particulate source type factors and migration potential factors. The names of these latter factors were also changed to highlight the differences between potential to release "mobility" and waste characteristics "mobility." (See §§ 6.1.2.1.3, 6.1.2.2.3.)

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Figure 9

Air Migration Pathway

PROPOSED HRS

Likelihood of Release	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Observed Release or Potential to Release		Toxicity/Mobility Hazardous Waste Quantity		Maximally Exposed Individual Population
Source Containment Source Type Source Mobility				Land Use Sensitive Environments

FINAL HRS

Likelihood of Release	X	Waste Characteristics	X	Targets
Observed Release or Potential to Release		Toxicity/Mobility Hazardous Waste Quantity		Nearest Individual Population Resources Sensitive Environments
Gas				
Gas Containment				
Gas Source Type				
Gas Migration Potential				
Particulate				
Particulate Containment				
Particulate Source Type				
Particulate Migration Potential				

In addition to these changes in the basic structure of the potential to release factors, the final rule includes several additional changes in the source type list, migration potential factors, and containment factors. Based on the experience gained in the field test, EPA added several source types to the source type list. Some of these additions (e.g., surface impoundment (not buried/backfilled); dry) simply clarify classifications that were implied in the proposed source type list. Other additions, such as source types involving biogas release, were considered early in the development of the proposed HRS but were not included originally in the interest of simplicity. Field test experience, however, indicated that their inclusion in the final rule was necessary. Finally, new distinctions within some source types (e.g., the various types of piles) were added partly in response to comments and partly as a result of field test experience. As applicable, source type values were also revised. (See §§ 6.1.2.1.2, 6.1.2.2.2 and Table 6-4.)

The revised gas and particulate migration potential factors are very similar to the proposed likelihood of release gas and particulate mobility factors. Several commenters questioned the need for including dry relative soil volatility in the final gas migration factor. A simplification analysis indicated that dry relative soil volatility was redundant, as it was almost completely determined by vapor pressure. Hence, the final gas migration potential factor includes only vapor pressure and Henry's law constant. The particulate migration potential factor in the final rule is simply the particulate component of the proposed potential to release mobility factor.

The containment factors were also changed as a result of the field test, a review of recent information on covering systems, the examination of air release rate models, and the public comments on the need for simplicity in the final rule. The final list of containment descriptions eliminated many redundant descriptions and changed others, retaining only those distinctions that are necessary based on type of source. (See §§ 6.1.2.1.1, 6.1.2.2.1 and Tables 6-3, 6-9.) As discussed in Section III F above, two new mobility factors were developed for the waste characteristics factor category.

Commenters generally supported the concept of distance weighting target factors. However, several disagreed with the approach used to develop the proposed factor values. Some commenters suggested basing the factor

values on long-term meteorology and the size of the site, while others suggested that additional atmospheric phenomena (e.g., particulate deposition) be reflected in the final values. As a result of these comments, EPA has revised the distance weighting factors used in the final rule to reflect long-term atmospheric phenomena. Analyses indicated that particulate deposition and other similar phenomena as well as site size were not sufficiently significant within four miles of a site to warrant their inclusion in the final factor values. EPA also notes that the distance weighting factor values are now incorporated in the population factor value table. (See § 6.3.2.4 and Table 6-17.)

P. Large Volume Wastes

Mining waste sites. A number of commenters representing mining companies, trade associations, and State and Federal agencies commented on how the proposed HRS would score mining waste sites; commenters representing waste management facilities raised similar issues in regard to their sites. This section summarizes and addresses the major issues addressed by these commenters.

Commenters raised several concerns regarding the appropriate consideration of background levels of metals in documenting direct or indirect releases from mining waste sites. One commenter recommended that in determining direct releases from a mining waste site, EPA should consider the natural characteristics of the site prior to mining and the changes in migration rates resulting from mining. The commenter explained that the concentration of metals in a mining waste pile may be similar to or less than natural concentrations in soil or rocks below and adjacent to the pile. To document indirect releases, the commenter suggested that EPA require collection of detailed information on site geology and hydrological gradients to ensure proper consideration of background levels. Finally, the commenter asserted that although it is appropriate to weight observed releases more heavily than potential releases at sites with synthetic organic hazardous substances, the criteria used to define observed release are not valid at sites with natural sources of metals. Another commenter agreed and suggested that because of background levels of inorganic elements, the proposed HRS could identify as an observed release concentrations unrelated to mining activities.

EPA recognizes that natural background concentrations of metals in soil or rocks can affect the measured

concentration necessary to establish an observed release at a mining waste site. This consideration is reflected in the requirement that concentrations significantly above background be shown to establish an observed release. Moreover, EPA has clarified the observed release criteria in the final rule to explain that they specify minimum differences necessary to establish an observed release by chemical analysis.

Several commenters questioned the treatment of metals in the ground water mobility factor. One commenter stated that the proposed HRS is biased against mining waste sites because it gives greater consideration to the accurate assessment of the mobility of organic substances than to that of naturally occurring metals. The commenter noted that the proposed persistence factor for the surface water migration pathway accounts for the degradation of hazardous substances in the environment through four processes. None of these processes, according to the commenter, applies to metallic elements, which received a default value of 3 (the highest possible score for persistence). Another commenter stated that decreased mobility was considered only for organic compounds, even though inorganic compounds are immobile in some situations.

One commenter stated that adding a metals mobility factor, as EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) recommended, would allow the HRS to reflect more accurately the potential for metallic elements to migrate in the aqueous phase. Two commenters were concerned that metals would be assigned a "worst-case" default value for mobility. On the other hand, another commenter stated that consideration of the mobility of metals in the revised HRS would at least partially rectify the bias in the current HRS against high-volume, low-concentration mining wastes.

A number of these commenters appear to have misunderstood the proposed rule. Metals were not automatically assigned the maximum value as a default in the ground water mobility factor, but rather were assigned values based on their coefficient of aqueous migration. The final rule automatically assigns the maximum value for mobility only to metals establishing an observed release by chemical analysis, which is the same way organics and nonmetallic inorganics are evaluated. For metals and metal compounds not establishing an observed release by chemical analysis, mobility is based on water solubility and distribution coefficient (K_d), the same as for organics and nonmetallic

inorganics. If none of the hazardous substances (including metals, organics, and nonmetallic inorganics) eligible to be evaluated for the site can be assigned a mobility factor value based on available data, § 3.2.1.2 of the final rule assigns a mobility factor value of 0.002 for all of the hazardous substances. This value was selected based on a review of the range of mobility factor values assigned to those hazardous substances (including metals) for which data were available for assigning mobility factor values. The value of 0.002 is clearly not a worst-case default (which would be 1.0).

EPA believes that the persistence factor is not biased against metals. Elemental metals do not degrade and, therefore, should receive higher scores for persistence than other substances subject to degradation processes.

One commenter claimed that the soil exposure pathway is likely to bias the HRS scores of mining waste sites toward higher values because such sites contain large volumes of waste covering large surface areas, and because of geographic factors, these large areas are seldom secured against direct public access. In addition, according to the commenter, the public may be attracted to mining waste sites. The commenter suggested that the soil exposure pathway incorrectly assumes there is an exposure because there is access to mining waste sites.

EPA does not agree that the soil exposure pathway is biased against mining waste sites. The pathway evaluates exposures of people via contact with surficial hazardous substances. The Agency believes that, all else being equal, large contaminated surface areas with public access, including those associated with mining waste sites, should receive higher scores for the soil exposure pathway than smaller sites with more restricted access. Even sites with large contaminated surface areas are unlikely to be assigned high scores except when they are near residential areas or include a listed sensitive environment. As some commenters representing mining-related activities have noted in the past, most mines are located some distance from inhabited areas.

Three commenters stated that the original HRS was biased against sites such as mining waste sites that are characterized by high volumes of waste with relatively low concentrations of toxic constituents. Two of these commenters suggested that mining wastes would be appropriate for hazardous constituent quantity determination because such wastes are relatively homogeneous (compared to

other wastes) and, therefore, have fairly consistent concentrations. One of these two commenters also stated that the hazardous waste quantity factor equations in Table 2-14 of the proposed rule should be revised to be less conservative. The remaining commenter suggested that the proposed HRS was still biased against mining waste sites because they are still scored based on the quantity of waste rather than on the concentration of the waste at the point of exposure.

EPA does not agree that the HRS is biased against high-volume, low-concentration waste sites. The final rule incorporates concentration data in three factors: (1) Likelihood of release (concentration data can be used for establishing an observed release); (2) hazardous waste quantity (concentration data, if available and adequate, can be used for calculating hazardous constituent quantity); and (3) targets (concentrations of hazardous substances present in drinking water wells or at other exposure points can be used to determine weightings for nearest individuals (or wells or intakes), populations, and sensitive environments factors). EPA has not explicitly required concentration data for all sites because of the substantial costs for obtaining these data and the very high degree of uncertainty associated with data collected during SIs.

EPA requested that the SAB review issues related to large-volume waste sites before the NPRM was published. The SAB final report is available in the CERCLA docket. Two commenters stated that the Agency did not adequately consider the SAB's recommendations for revising the HRS, specifically those concerning the use of mobility data.

The SAB, in its review of the original HRS, examined whether large-volume waste sites (e.g., mining waste sites) had been treated differently than other waste sites and concluded that insufficient data were presented to demonstrate that the original HRS was biased against mining waste sites. However, the SAB noted that the original HRS had the potential for such a bias, particularly when scoring potential to release, because the original HRS did not consider mobility, concentration of hazardous constituents, and transport. The SAB suggested several possible modifications to improve the application of the HRS to mining waste sites.

Based in part on the SAB suggestions, EPA proposed several changes to the overall scoring process to make the HRS more accurately reflect risks associated with mining waste sites, notably, addition of a mobility factor to the air

and ground water migration pathways, changes in the persistence factor, incorporation of a tiered hazardous waste quantity factor that can account for waste concentration data, and addition of health-based benchmarks for evaluating population. As explained in the NPRM, determining speciation of metals and pH, as the SAB had suggested, is not feasible given the temporal and spatial variations at hazardous waste sites and the limitations on SI data collection. Moreover, determining speciation is not feasible for most substances given EPA's current analytical procedures; requiring speciation analyses would add substantially to the cost of data collection.

Two commenters stated that the proposed HRS can significantly overestimate risks associated with mining waste sites that consist of high-volume, low-concentration wastes. One of these commenters recommended a "preliminary evaluation system" to more accurately reflect the actual risks associated with such sites and remove any bias in the HRS relative to other types of sites. This commenter also suggested that in proposing the HRS revisions, EPA had ignored the results of its own studies under RCRA sections 3001 and 8002, which the commenter believed to be more focused efforts to quantify risks from mining waste sites than the HRS revisions.

EPA does not believe that a separate "preliminary evaluation system" for scoring mining waste sites would be appropriate. A single HRS can be applied uniformly to all sites, allowing the Agency to evaluate sites relative to each other with respect to actual and potential hazards. The Agency examined the RCRA studies cited by the commenter before proposing HRS revisions. Those studies, which focus on the management of wastes at active facilities, concluded that many special study waste sites (e.g., mining) do not present very high risks, while others may present substantial risks. EPA believes that the conclusions of these studies and the Agency's subsequent regulatory determinations (i.e., not to regulate most mining wastes under RCRA Subtitle C) are not inconsistent with a determination that some mining waste releases can require Superfund response actions. Furthermore, the HRS is designed so that it can be applied to closed and abandoned sites as well as active sites.

Other large volume waste sites. Several commenters suggested that the proposed HRS did not meet CERCLA section 125 requirements for sites

involving fossil fuel combustion wastes. These commenters generally agreed that section 125 requires EPA to consider the quantity and concentration of hazardous constituents in fossil fuel combustion wastes and that the proposed HRS had not adequately addressed this requirement.

One commenter supported the Agency's proposal to allow consideration of concentration data when such data are available. Three commenters stated that the proposed HRS would often assign fossil fuel combustion waste sites high scores in part because of the worst-case assumptions or "default values" for certain factors (i.e., hazardous waste quantity, toxicity, target populations). The commenters claimed that fossil fuel combustion waste sites receive high scores merely because of the large quantity of waste, although this waste presents no significant adverse environmental effects, and that these high scores are inconsistent with EPA's findings in the RCRA section 8002 study. One of the three commenters suggested that the proposed HRS retained certain deficiencies of the original HRS, such as assuming that all hazardous substances in the waste consist of the single most toxic constituent in the waste.

EPA does not believe that the approach taken in the final rule creates a bias against fossil fuel combustion wastes. Partly because concentration data are considered in the final rule, fossil fuel combustion waste sites are not expected to score disproportionately high when compared with other types of sites. The HRS assumes that it is not possible to determine in a consistent manner the relative contribution to risk of all hazardous substances found at sites. Given this assumption, EPA has determined that basing the toxicity of the combination of substances at a site on the toxicity of the substance posing the greatest hazard is a reasonable and appropriately conservative approach. In many cases, the substance posing the greatest hazard is not several orders of magnitude more toxic than other hazardous substances at the site. Therefore, the effect of this approach on the toxicity factor value—which is evaluated in one order of magnitude scoring categories—is not as great as some commenters have suggested (see also section III D). In addition, as noted above, worst-case defaults are not assigned for mobility; population factors have no default values.

Two commenters suggested that because CERCLA section 125 contains no statutory deadlines, EPA should take as much time as necessary to

adequately respond. These commenters recommended that EPA extend the tiered approach of the hazardous waste quantity factor to other factors to take advantage of the extensive data on fossil fuel combustion wastes generated by the electric utility industry.

The Agency does not agree that the tiered approach used in the hazardous waste quantity factor should be extended to other factors for fossil fuel combustion waste sites (see also section III K). EPA believes that creating a separate HRS to score certain types of sites would not allow the Agency to provide a uniform measure of relative risk at a wide variety of sites, as Congress intended.

One commenter recommended that EPA consider using fate and transport models currently under development to incorporate quantitative representations of specific processes and mechanisms into the HRS. EPA carefully examined this possibility and concluded that although the use of fate and transport models could conceivably increase the accuracy of the HRS for some pathways, collection of the required site-specific data would be far too complex and costly. Fate and transport models are appropriate for a comprehensive risk assessment, but not for a screening tool such as the HRS. In addition, EPA's review suggested that it would be more difficult to achieve consistent results among users of such models than with the HRS. EPA points out that it used fate and transport models to develop the distance weighting factors used in the HRS target calculations, and also that the HRS incorporates several hazardous substance parameters (e.g., mobility) and site parameters (e.g., travel time) that are components of fate and transport models.

Two commenters expressed concern that the proposed HRS fails to account for the leachability of hazardous constituents as required by CERCLA section 125. According to the commenters, some hazardous constituents pose no risk via ground water because they will never be released to that medium. Thus, even if hazardous waste quantity and concentration are considered adequately, hazardous waste quantity scores for fossil fuel combustion sites will be erroneously high unless leachability is considered as well.

EPA examined the availability of leachate data and the feasibility of using such data for calculating hazardous substance quantity for all types of sources and wastes. The Agency decided against using leachate concentrations because:

- Leachate data are not available for all sources and wastes, and available leachate data on high-volume wastes and some landfills have limited applicability for estimating the quantity of leachable hazardous substances;
- Leachate data derived from lab studies are limited and do not realistically represent the universe of field conditions such as heterogeneity of wastes, chemistry of leachate, and density and pore volume of disposed wastes; and
- Any method for using leachate data could not be consistently or uniformly applied to all sites.

EPA also examined the feasibility of developing site-specific leachate data for estimating leachable hazardous substance quantity for the ground water migration pathway. EPA decided against this option because reliable estimation of leachable hazardous substance quantity requires comprehensive sampling of site-specific heterogeneous waste, which would be prohibitively expensive and not feasible. In some cases, such sampling would be technically unfeasible and unsafe.

EPA evaluated alternatives for developing a surrogate for estimating leachable hazardous substance quantity. The Agency found that adding the mobility factor to the ground water migration pathway, based both on solubilities and distribution coefficients (K_d s) of hazardous substances, and multiplying it by the hazardous waste quantity factor would be a feasible alternative for approximating the fraction of hazardous substance quantity expected to be released to ground water.

Q. Consideration of Removal Actions (Current Versus Initial Conditions)

The original HRS based the evaluation of factors on initial conditions. In the preamble to the proposed rule, EPA specifically requested comments on whether sites should be scored on the basis of initial or current conditions. The principal question is whether the effect of response actions, such as the removal of some quantity of the waste, should be considered when sites are scored. Initial conditions are defined by the timing of the response action; that is, initial conditions are the conditions that existed prior to any response action. For sites where no response action has occurred, initial and current conditions are the same for evaluating sites.

Of the 25 commenters responding to this issue, 15—including all industry commenters—supported scoring on current conditions. In the preamble of

the proposed rule, EPA presented two approaches for considering response actions in HRS scores: (1) Consider these actions only for those pathways and factors for which they are most appropriate; and (2) consider these actions in all pathways, but make exceptions at sites where initial conditions more accurately reflect risks.

Those who stated a preference favored the second, specifying that the exceptions should be clearly defined in the final rule. These commenters stated that scoring all pathways on current conditions would encourage responsible parties to clean up sites quickly. They reasoned that if cleanups are delayed, the threat of migration of the hazardous substances increases; therefore, scoring on current conditions is consistent with the intent of CERCLA because it encourages rapid remedial action. One commenter said that scoring on initial conditions made little sense when, as a result of the cleanup, the level of residual contamination was below the level required by CERCLA.

Several proponents of scoring on current conditions stated that EPA's concern that responsible parties would clean up sites just enough to avoid being listed on the NPL was unfounded. They argued that the proposed scoring system is too complicated to manipulate, and that predicting the effect of partial cleanups on the final score would be difficult. Others suggested that where contamination remains, sampling during an SI will discover it.

Ten commenters did not fully support scoring on current conditions. Only one opposed any consideration of current conditions. Several commenters supported scoring the soil exposure and air migration pathways on current conditions. Others stated that response actions should be considered only when the actions are conducted under Federal or State direction, or when the action constitutes a complete cleanup. Several added that State actions should not be considered because it would penalize States with active remedial programs. One commenter suggested scoring sites on both current and initial conditions; if the response action had addressed all hazards, then the current conditions score should be used.

Based on public comment, EPA has decided to change its policy on consideration of removal actions. The Agency agrees that consideration of such actions in HRS scores is likely to increase incentives for rapid actions by responsible parties, reducing risks to the public and allowing for more cost effective expenditure of the Fund. In making this decision, EPA tried to balance the benefits of considering

removal actions in HRS scores (e.g., increased incentives for rapid actions) while also ensuring that the HRS score reflects any continuing risks at sites where contamination occurred prior to any response action.

Therefore, EPA will calculate waste quantities based on current conditions. However, EPA believes the accuracy of this approach depends on being able to determine with reasonable confidence the quantity of hazardous constituents remaining in sources at the site and the quantity released into the environment. As a consequence, where the Agency does not have sufficient information to estimate the quantity of hazardous constituents remaining in the sources at the site and in the associated releases, a minimum factor value may be assigned to the hazardous waste quantity factor value. Thus, removal actions may not reduce waste quantity factor values unless the quantity of hazardous constituents remaining in sources and in releases can be estimated with reasonable confidence.

In addition to providing incentives for early response, this approach also provides incentives for potentially responsible parties to ascertain the extent of the remaining contamination at sites. Potentially responsible parties undertaking removal actions will have the primary responsibility for collecting any data needed to support a determination of the quantity of hazardous constituents remaining. EPA expects responsible parties may need to conduct sampling and analyses to determine the extent of hazardous substance migration in soils and other media in order to estimate with reasonable confidence the quantity of hazardous constituents remaining.

EPA decided not to limit the consideration of response actions to certain pathways (e.g., the soil exposure pathway) because this would overstate the risk at sites where removal of wastes has eliminated threats in all pathways. Moreover, a more limited approach to consideration of response actions would provide less incentive for rapid response action.

EPA will evaluate a site based on current conditions provided that response actions actually have removed wastes from the site for proper disposal or destruction in a facility permitted under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), or by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. HRS scoring will not consider the effects of responses that do not reduce waste quantities such as providing alternate drinking water supplies to populations with drinking water supplies

contaminated by the site. In such cases, EPA believes that the initial targets factor should be used to reflect the adverse impacts caused by contamination of drinking water supplies; otherwise, a contaminated aquifer could be artificially shielded from further remediation. This decision is consistent with SARA section 118(a), which requires that EPA give high priority to sites where contamination from the site results in closed drinking water wells. Similarly, if residents are relocated or if a school is closed because of contamination due to the site, EPA will consider the initial targets in scoring the site.

As noted in the proposed rule preamble, EPA would only consider removals conducted prior to an SI. EPA believes that the SI is the appropriate time to evaluate conditions, because it is the source of most of the data used to score a site. Because response action at sites may be an ongoing process, it would be burdensome to recalculate scores continually to reflect such actions.

In response to commenters, EPA also considered whether response actions should be considered in HRS scores only if they are performed under a State or EPA order. EPA decided not to choose this approach for two reasons. First, it would diminish the incentive for an expeditious response at the site if a signed order were required. Second, because a response action must be conducted before the SI to be considered in the HRS score, there would be little information on site conditions upon which this order could be based.

EPA has also decided not to differentiate between response actions initiated by States and those conducted by other parties. The Agency believes this approach will help ensure consistent application of the HRS by avoiding situations where two similar sites are scored using different sets of rules. Moreover, although the Agency is sympathetic to concerns about disincentives to States for initiating actions, it believes that such cases will be rare. Many State (and Federal) removal actions are interim measures designed to stabilize conditions at the site. Given the more limited definition of response action noted above (e.g., removal of waste from the site for disposal or destruction in a RCRA-permitted facility), many actions conducted by States would not be considered in HRS scoring. In addition, in many cases, State and Federal removal actions are undertaken after an SI has been conducted. As noted above,

EPA will only consider removals conducted before the SI in the HRS score.

R. Cutoff Score

In the NPRM preamble, EPA proposed that the cutoff score for the revised HRS be functionally equivalent to the current cutoff score of 28.5. The Agency also requested comment on three proposed options for determining functional equivalence:

- Option 1: Score sites using both the original and final rule, then use statistical analysis to determine what revised HRS score best corresponds to 28.5;

- Option 2: Choose a score that would result in an NPL of the same size as the NPL that would be created by using the original HRS; and

- Option 3: Identify the risk level that would correspond to 28.5 in the original HRS and then determine what revised HRS score corresponds to that risk level.

Some commenters stated that there cannot be a functional equivalence if the revisions have any meaning. They argued that if the revisions meet the statutory mandate to make the HRS more accurate, the scores should be different and, therefore, cannot be related. Several commenters supported the use of a functional equivalent, but were divided about which option should be used. One commenter stated that the 28.5 score should be evaluated to determine whether it reflected minimum risk levels. If it did, the commenter suggested that a functional equivalent would be appropriate and should be determined using equivalent risk levels (option 3), but also with an eye toward keeping the NPL to a manageable size (option 2).

Commenters not supporting the use of a functional equivalent suggested a variety of alternative approaches, including:

- Establish the cutoff score based on risk, without regard to the current cutoff level or a functional equivalent;

- Leave the score at 28.5;

- Propose a new cutoff score and a description of methodology in a public notice with a 60-day public comment period;

- Lower the cutoff score to provide an incentive to responsible parties to undertake remedial efforts and make it possible for sites where a removal action has taken place to make the NPL, thus reducing the controversy over whether to score sites based on current conditions;

- Raise the cutoff score by at least 20 points;

- Eliminate the present cutoff score by creating categories of sites instead of

individual ranks as a means of prioritizing NPL sites;

- Amend the NPL annually to include only those sites that deserve priority attention (e.g., orphaned sites) and are likely to receive Superfund financing; or

- Rank all sites showing any degree of public health and/or environmental risk on a relative scale and perform remedial activities based on available funding.

In addition, four commenters felt that the cutoff score for the final rule should not be fixed until the technical merits and potential scores of representative sites are tested and compared using both the current and proposed HRS. Further, one commenter noted that the field test did not indicate the relationship between the revised HRS score for a given site and the current score; another added that until this equivalency issue is clarified, meaningful comment on any proposed revisions cannot be made.

Based on an analysis of 110 test sites, EPA has decided not to change the cutoff score at this time. This conclusion was reached after applying all three approaches to setting a cutoff score that would be functionally equivalent to 28.5. In its analysis, the Agency scored field test sites with both the original and revised HRS. The data from these test sites show that few sites score in the range of 25 to 30 with the revised HRS model. The Agency believes that this range may represent a breakpoint in the distribution of site scores and that the sites scoring above the range of 25-30 are clearly the types of sites that the Agency should capture with a screening model. Because the analysis did not point to a single number as the appropriate cutoff, the Agency has decided to continue to employ 28.5 as a management tool for identifying sites that are candidates for the National Priorities List.

EPA believes that the cutoff score has been, and should continue to be, a mechanism that allows it to make objective decisions on national priorities. Because the HRS is intended to be a screening system, the Agency has never attached significance to the cutoff score as an indicator of a specific level of risk from a site, nor has the Agency intended the cutoff to reflect a point below which no risk was present. The score of 28.5 is not meant to imply that risky and non-risky sites can be precisely distinguished. Nevertheless, the cutoff score has been a useful screening tool that has allowed the Agency to set priorities and to move forward with studying and, where appropriate, cleaning up hazardous

waste sites. The vast majority of sites scoring above 28.5 in the past have been shown to present risks. EPA believes that a cutoff score of 28.5 will continue to serve this crucial function.

IV. Section-by-Section Analysis of Rule Changes

Besides the changes discussed above, EPA has made substantial editorial revisions in the rule being adopted today. Source characterization is discussed in section 2 of the final rule, along with factors that are evaluated in each pathway. These factors include hazardous waste quantity, toxicity, and evaluation of targets based on benchmarks. The order of presentation of the pathways has been changed to ground water, surface water, soil exposure, and air. Following the four sections describing the pathways, a section has been added explaining how to evaluate sites that have radionuclides either as the only hazardous substances at the site or in combination with other hazardous substances.

In general, descriptive text that provided background information has been removed as have references and data sources; the sections have been rewritten to make the rule easier to read and to apply. The figures presenting overviews of the pathways and the scoring sheets have been revised throughout to reflect changes in the rule and assigned values.

This section describes, for each section of the rule and each table, the specific substantive changes; editorial changes that do not affect the content of the rule are not generally noted.

Section 1 Introduction

The text explaining the background of the HRS and describing the rule has been removed. Definitions of a number of additional terms used in the rule have been added for clarity. The definition of "hazardous substance" has been revised for clarification. The definition of "site" has been clarified and now indicates that the area between sources may also be considered part of the site. The definition of "source" has been revised to explain that those volumes of air, ground water, surface water, or surface water sediments that become contaminated by migration of hazardous substances are not considered a source, except contaminated ground water plumes or contaminated surface water sediments may be considered a source if they cannot be attributed to an identified source. In addition, the definition of source now includes soils contaminated by migration of hazardous substances.